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ABSTRACT

To determine the extent of influence that a reader's perspective as a member of a specific audience has on the assessment of student writing, a study examined the holistic judgment and the positive and negative comments made by four different types of writing evaluators on 40 different letters, each of which was written to one of four audience types. Writing samples were taken from randomly selected grade 12 students in five randomly chosen English classes. Each student was assigned to write a persuasive letter to one of four types of people: teachers, students their own age, parents, and business people from the community. Forty of the letters (10 from each group) were then holistically evaluated by 40 writing evaluators who represented the four audiences. Findings showed that, in terms of a global response, an evaluator's rater type was not a predictive factor. Audience type was the significant factor in holistic assessment, with the highest scores being given to letters that had been prepared for teachers and business people. Results suggest that, while rater type was influential in a rater's analytical response to a text, the rater's overall impression of the text's success in satisfying the major goals of the writing task was the deciding factor in the holistic ratings. (HOD)

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THE INFLUENCE OF AUDIENCE ON THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT WRITING

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This study is an examination of the theory that a critical evaluation of a text is affected by the reader-evaluator's relationship to it. It is generally assumed by rhetoricians that most writing has communication as its primary purpose and that successful communication depends on the writer's ability to understand reader characteristics well enough to make an appropriate appeal. From Aristotle (Rhetoric, trans.,Roberts, 1954) to our contemporaries such as Murray (1968), Tierney and LaZansky (1981), Moffett (1968, 1975), Britton (1970, 1975, 1978), and Gibson (1969), the theorists seem to agree that an argument's cleverness, or even its truth, counts little if the message is directed at the wrong audience.

If communication depends on the writer's ability to make an appropriate appeal to an intended audience, there should be some link between the writer's address of a particular reader and that reader's evaluation of the writer's text. The work of some literary critics and researchers in the fields of reading and writing evaluation suggests that a reader's identity or audience type may be a significant factor in predicting the reader's assessment of a text. These researchers describe an active reader who, while constrained by the text, works to comprehend and shape meaning by bringing to it personal experiences and prior knowledge.

Researchers in the field of reading have long been interested in the influence that a reader's background and expectations have on comprehension. Very early in the twentieth century, Huey (1908/1968) observed that meaning is the result of the reader's construction of the writer's text and not merely a simple transmission of the print. As Kolers (Huey, 1968) noted, Huey observed that the reader interprets the text in light of what he or she already knows. The results of more recent investigations into the reader-text interrelationship made by Page (1980, 1981), Smith (1975, 1977), Goodman (1976) and many others are consistent with Huey's idea that even the reader's interpretation of a word depends, not only on the subject matter of the text, but on what the reader expects to find there as well.

Literary critics as a group generally regard the text as the sole source of meaning, but not all who study the literary experience are entirely text-centered. Louise M. Rosenblatt (1938/1968, 1978, 1981) has been chief among those who focus on the reader's contribution to meaning. She described reading as a two-way transaction between reader and text, and suggested that it is the reader's job "to create the communications behind the text" (1981). The linguistic and experiential histories that readers bring to the reading process have an effect on what readers make of what they see in the text.

Rosenblatt did not intend to suggest that every interpretation made by a reader is necessarily a legitimate one. She cautioned that, while there is no single, "correct" reading of

a text, there is a band of correctness that is imposed by textual constraints (1981). While the individual interpretation that a reader brings to a text reflects the reader's perspective, the interpretation must be consistent within the context of the work as a whole in order to stand as a valid reading. She gave as an example of legitimate variations of interpretation, the two very different readings of the Old Testament that are given by Jewish and Christian Biblical scholars. Both groups of scholars draw different, yet defensible, conclusions from the same materials.

Although the work of literary critics such as Rosenblatt and reading specialists such as Huey, Page, Goodman, and Smith does not directly address the problem of writing assessment, it does highlight an area of special concern for those who study it. Assessment researchers have traditionally viewed variations in reader response as reader error. They have concentrated their efforts on eliminating uniqueness in reader response rather than on studying it. Until very recently, typical evaluation research hypothesized and tested standards against which any piece of writing could be objectively judged, regardless of its audience or purpose. The work of Paul Diederich and his colleagues (1974, 1977) is a classic example of the researchers' quest for perfect objectivity. It is also interesting because it sheds light on the way that the reader's identity, or membership in a particular audience group, affects writing assessment.

Diederich and his associates performed a study to determine

generally, "the qualities of student writing that intelligent, educated people notice and emphasize when they are free to grade as they like" (1974). While Diederich's goal was to identify elements in the writing product that could be used to establish a universal standard for writing, the results of his study seemed to give added support to the idea that different kinds of readers have different standards. The fact that different readers saw the papers differently was not at all surprising. What was remarkable, however, was the way in which the readers in the study tended to evaluate the papers with group perspectives.

Readers from six occupational fields were used by Diederich in his study: college English teachers and social science teachers, writers and editors, lawyers, and business executives. While the very largest category of concern cutting across all groups was ideas, the study noted consistent trends in the types of comments and overall evaluations made by the readers on essays written by college freshmen. English teachers tended to comment most strongly on usage, sentence structure, and punctuation; editors and writers on word choice and on what Diederich termed style; and business executives most noticeably on organization. In the actual ranking of the papers, there was still more evidence to support group tendencies. Diederich reported a significant degree of difference on the scores given the papers among the groups who clustered on the writing characteristics, but a high agreement among individuals within the groups.

Diederich assumed that well educated readers would have

compatible standards, and the students in his study wrote for a general, professional group. The general audience that he had imagined did not, however, actually exist within the study that he had designed. It was really far more diverse, and the design of his study intensified differences. Mitchell and Taylor (1979) pointed out that Diederich specifically asked his readers to evaluate the student papers with standards and expectations of the disciplines within which each had been trained. This instruction focused the readers' group perspectives. As we have seen, their responses were clearly related to reader type.

One of the newest and most successful forms of writing evaluation is primary trait scoring. This evaluation technique does consciously what Diederich did unintentionally. It standardizes reader response to a text by forcing readers to abandon personal evaluation perspectives for one that is defined by the writing assignment. Primary trait scoring is based on the theory that each piece of writing has a "primary" trait that is essentially responsible for its effectiveness (Lloyd-Jones, 1978). The method assumes that a text should be judged largely by the criteria that are appropriate to the specific purposes for which it was written (Cooper and Odell, 1978). Evaluators use a guided rating system to rank the writer's skill in employing an approach appropriate to the audience and purpose assigned by the writing task (Mullis, 1980).

Primary trait scoring, like other standard evaluation methods, is text-centered in its approach, but it avoids the problem that Diederich ran into in his study, by controlling

the evaluator's perspective toward the papers to be assessed. To overcome the natural biases of readers, evaluation instructions carefully indicate the writer's purpose and intended audience for the text. Most importantly, evaluators are instructed to read the text, not from their own perspectives, but from that of the audience assigned by the task. Primary Trait evaluation narrows the possible range of evaluator response by providing restraints or limits within which a given paper may be read. Consequently, it is an unusually reliable method for assigning grades to papers. Agreement is very high among evaluators who use the technique to rank or rate writing. Correlations between two readers average .90 or better (Mullis, 1980). It appears that audience perspective, even when that perspective is assigned by the evaluation context, has an influence on writing evaluation.

The Problem

Rhetorical theory and research in areas such as literature, reading, and writing evaluation suggest that there is some relationship between the reader's identity and the perspective that the reader takes on a text. This study attempted to determine the extent of influence that a reader's perspective as a member of a specific audience has on the assessment of student writing. In other words, does the reader's perspective as a member of a specific audience influence his/her judgement of student writing? If, as rhetorical theory suggests, readers do respond more favorably to texts that specifically address them,

there should be a significant difference in the evaluation of essays across both reader type and audience type.

The problem was examined in two ways. First, the study asked if there were a significant difference in the evaluation of texts made by readers of specific audience types. Secondly, it asked if there were a significant difference in the evaluations of texts that were written for readers of a specific audience type.

Procedures

Writing samples were taken from randomly selected grade 12 students in five randomly chosen English classes in an urban Massachusetts high school. Each student was assigned to write a persuasive letter that urged some action for either renovation of the students' own high school or new construction. Students were randomly assigned to write to one of four types of people who were said to be members of a school building committee: teachers, students their own age, parents, and business people from the community. Forty of the letters, 10 from each audience type, were randomly drawn from the evaluation sample.

Forty writing evaluators were then recruited. Each evaluator was selected as a rater on the basis of actual membership in one of the four audiences to whom the students had written: English teachers, high school students, parents, and business people from the community. Evaluators performed two types of assessment on each of the letters. The first method of assessment was holistic scoring. Evaluators were told to imagine

that they were members of a building committee. Each was then asked to read and rank holistically all 40 of the letters in the sample as though each one had been written specifically for that evaluator's audience type. The evaluators had no idea that only 10 of the 40 letters were actually addressed specifically to them and that the address of the other 30 was evenly divided among the three other audience groups.

Holistic Evaluation

The holistic data were analyzed by means of a multiple analysis of variance that compared the means of the holistic ratings of the letters grouped in two ways. Letters were grouped first according to the audience for whom they were written. Secondly, they were grouped according to the raters by whom the letters had been evaluated. The dependent variable for the analysis of variance procedure was the holistic rating given each letter by each rater. The independent variables were the essays' audience type and the readers' rater type. Handwriting, spelling errors per number of words, and length were treated as covariates.

The holistic ratings were analyzed on the basis of three hypotheses stated in the study:

HO_1 No significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level exists among the means of holistic ratings of the letters written for four different audiences: English teachers (A1), students (A2), parents (A3), and business people (A4).

HO_2 No significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level exists

among the means of holistic ratings of letters rated by four different groups of raters: English teachers (R1), students (R2), parents (R3), and business people (R4).

HO_3 No significant interaction at the $p < 0.05$ level exists between the means of holistic ratings of letters written for four different audiences (A1-A4) and the means of holistic ratings by four different groups of raters (R1-R4).

Qualitative Evaluations

The second method of assessment performed in the study was a relatively open-ended, qualitative commentary on the student letters. Each evaluator commented on each letter's greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses. Thirteen positive and negative comment categories were drawn from the comments made.

The raters' comments were analyzed in a two-step procedure. First, a partial correlation was run on the data to investigate the possibility of any significant relationship between the types of comments that raters had made on the letters and their overall, holistic evaluations of them. Holistic ratings were used as the dependent variables in this analysis, and the 13 comment categories (26 positive and negative) were used as independent variables. Handwriting, spelling errors per number of words, conventional grammar errors per number of words, and length were used as covariates.

As a second step, those comment categories that had a

significant relationship with the holistic ratings of the letters were analyzed, using a factorial analysis of variance procedure. For this procedure the letters were grouped in two ways. First, they were grouped according to the audience for whom they were written. They were then grouped according to the raters by whom they had been evaluated. Handwriting, spelling errors per number of words, conventional grammar errors per number of words, and length were again used as covariates.

Results

Evaluation of Holistic Ratings

Only one of the three null hypotheses stated in the study could be rejected. A statistical analysis of the data showed that the audience to whom students wrote was a significant factor in the holistic scoring of the letters. As TABLE I exemplifies, the F ratio of 9.0 for the means of holistic ratings of essays written for four different audiences was significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. This finding permitted the rejection of null hypothesis HO_1. Stated another way, the data of this study revealed a significant difference among the means of holistic ratings of letters written for the four different audiences.

To determine which audiences differed and in what ways, a oneway analysis of variance was run with a Scheffé a posteriori ranges test. The mean holistic ratings of letters written for the business and teacher audiences were significantly greater ($p < 0.05$) than were the mean ratings of letters written for either the student or parent audiences. All four types of raters

preferred letters written to teacher and business audiences. The means of holistic ratings of letters written for the teacher and business audiences were not different enough from one another to be significant.

Neither null hypothesis HO_2 nor HO_3 was rejected by the data. Contrary to the assumptions of rhetoricians who suggest that readers will respond more favorably to texts that specifically address them than to those that do not, writing evaluators in this study did not necessarily prefer the letters that were written to the audience types by which they had been described. Finally, there was no interaction present in the data.

Discussion

There are several tentative conclusions that may be drawn from the results of this part of the study. First it appears that students may have found certain types of audiences easier than others to understand or to approach in writing. Secondly, it also seems that the assessment context itself, or the manner in which the evaluators' role was described, may have provided an assessment perspective that superceded the readers' own membership in societally based rater categories.

Audience Type

Writers seemed to have made more convincing arguments for some audiences than for others. Letters written to teachers and business persons received significantly higher holistic ratings than those written to either parents or students. A survey of

the types of appeals that the writers made in the letters by audience type may shed some light on the difference in holistic ratings. Letters to teachers and business people were far more likely to express ideas on the quality of education and the educational facilities in the school than were those addressed to students and parents. Eight of the letters to teachers, for example, mentioned scholastic concerns, and six of the letters to business people took up the topic, but such issues were noted in only four letters to parents and in only two addressed to students. The financial benefits to either renovating or building a new school were mentioned in six letters to business people. Only two letters to parents referred to cost, though parents as a group could have been expected to show an interest in the financial side of the school issue.

While virtually all the letters referred to the unpleasant, even dangerous, physical facilities at the schools, letters to students and parents tended to focus most heavily on "quality of life." Comments on topics such as inadequate sports facilities, the absence of parking areas for student and faculty cars, and peeling paint and other aesthetic concerns seemed to dominate the arguments found in the letters to parents and students to an extent that is not seen in letters to teachers and business people.

Obviously, writers in the study made judgements about all four audiences, but those who addressed students and parents seemed to have missed the mark. While most writers addressing teachers and business persons appear to have approached their audiences with issues that were concerned with maintaining

academic excellence and cost, those who addressed parents and students argued primarily on the basis of personal reactions to the building's atmosphere and its inconvenience.

It is possible that the failure to address students and parents successfully may have been caused by the writers' inability to formulate a clear image of either group as receivers of the type of written message assigned in the study. On the other hand, writers seemed to have had little problem visualizing teacher and business audiences. Students in general are familiar with the teacher as a serious audience for writing. As seniors, the student writers had spent 12 years learning what teachers want to know and how they want that information delivered. They had had ample opportunity to study teacher attitudes and expectations. Although business people may at first appear to be the most alien of the four audiences to whom the students were asked to write, in fact, they, too, are an exceptionally well defined audience, having well known, specific interests. They even have their own style of no-nonsense writing that students could use as a model for letters to them. The image of the business reader is of one who demands careful organization and thought, brevity, and attention to detail on serious issues.

Parents and students were probably the most difficult audiences in the study for the student writers to define. Unlike teachers and business people, parents and the student writers' own peers are not natural audiences for formal argumentation or correspondence. The natural, though probably rare, correspondence of notes and personal letters that are exchanged

between children and parents or high school students and their peers is very different from the writing assignment in the study.

Arguments in the letters seem to suggest that many of the writers thought that parents and students would respond more favorably to the writers' own personal concerns and experiences, than to the financial or scholastic issues that were involved in the school controversy. Judging from the letters that parents and students ranked highly, however, it appears that both groups saw themselves as more general, parent or student citizens, who were interested in public, rather than private, aspects of the topic. Regardless of audience type, raters were far more impressed with letters that put forth formal arguments, addressing serious, academic and/or economic issues. Of course, the evaluators' preference for the more objective, formal type of argument may also be related to the evaluation context, a topic that can best be explored in relation to rater type.

Rater Type

It is possible that rater type was not a significant factor in the holistic scoring of the papers for a reason that also caused two of the four audiences in the study to be more consistently preferred by all evaluators: the assessment context may have broken down clear distinctions among the specified audience and rater types. Readers were, after all, asked to think of themselves as teachers, students, parents, or business people who were members of an advisory committee. From this

perspective, all raters, regardless of rater type, read with exactly the same public purpose--to gather information so that they could make a recommendation to the city council and school committee. As this more general group, they may have come to expect formal or "school style" letters that would deal with issues affecting the public at large. Personal or friendly letters to a familiar audience may not have seemed appropriate.

Of course, the assessment context implies another image, as well. The very fact that the raters were reading the papers for the purpose of ranking them on a four point scale may have had an intrusive effect on what would have been their normal feelings about the papers' effectiveness. Reading for the purpose of assessment may have influenced all four rater types to have assumed an evaluation stance that only teachers would normally have taken.

Implications of the Holistic Results

The results of the holistic evaluation of the letters have several implications for writing assessment and instruction.

1. The major finding of the holistic evaluation of the letters was that all raters, regardless of their own rater types, favored the letters that were written to business people and teachers. This phenomenon could have been caused by the assessment context itself. Evaluation may be a task that influences the evaluator to expect formal discourse, unless specific instructions are given to the contrary. Such instructions would,

of course, represent a change in the evaluation context, and new expectations would be set for the reader.

In fact, it appears that holistic scoring is sensitive to details in the assessment context. In this study, for example, the suggestion in the instructions to raters that they all, regardless of type, take the additional, public role of advisory committee members seems to have helped standardize their global assessment of the letters. Apparently, if assessment instructions clearly identify the particular perspective from which an evaluator is to view a text and specify the purpose for reading it, the actual reader type or identity of the evaluator will not be an overwhelming factor. It may not be necessary, for example, to use only teachers who work at the grade level of the students tested in holistic scoring sessions. Readers of various types could be scorers in the same session.

2. The study also seems to point out that common understandings between writer and evaluator are necessary before students begin to write. Factors such as the evaluator's perception of the seriousness of the writing task or the assessment purpose influence the evaluator's point of view, expectations, and assessment criteria. It is crucial, therefore, that both the writer and the evaluator have the same understanding of the text's purpose and audience. Only if the writer has a clear understanding of the way that the reader-evaluator views the

writing task can he or she determine the appropriate level of discourse and the issues that will be regarded as relevant.

3. Finally, the results of the holistic portion of the study suggest that the writer's general lack of success in addressing student and parent audiences may have been caused by the writers' failure to have realized that these two groups were interested in the same kinds of issues that teachers and business people were interested in. Perhaps the writers' basic difficulty was in their not ever having had enough opportunities to write for a variety of audiences on a variety of topics. Learning to address a wide range of audiences is, however, more than a matter of assigning students to write to different kinds of people in society. After all, writers in this study attempted to make adjustments in their approaches to accommodate the audiences assigned to them, but whole groups of writers misjudged their readers. Writing instruction should, perhaps, include a study of different types of audiences, from the most familiar to the most distant. Moreover, such an investigation should be related to the purpose of the writing task, since purpose clearly defines the level of the audience's concern in reading the text. Instruction could be incorporated into the prewriting phase of the writing process, where it might properly include activities such as interviewing, role playing, library research, and discussion.

Evaluation of Qualitative Commentary

In a second phase of evaluation, the raters made qualitative remarks on the letters. A positive relationship between the holistic scores that raters gave the letters and the comments that they made was the criterion for any further examination of the comments' relation to audience and rater type.

The thirteen separate comment categories, both positive and negative, that were identified from among the thousands of comments that had been made by evaluators on the letters are listed and described below:

Impact - Holistic remarks that indicated a general impression, i.e., "well written," "dreadful."

Idea - Comments on the positions taken by writers in the letters, content.

Documentation and Idea Development - Comments about the writer's elaboration, quantity or quality of detail.

Voice/Audience - Comments indicating that the writer projects an attribute or personality to the audience, i.e., "forceful," "apathetic," use of personal experience.

Structure/Organization - Comments on the manner of overall order and/or development of the argument.

Style/Tone - Comments on the method of presentation or mode consciously chosen by the writer.

Length

Mechanics - Comments on punctuation, capitalization.

Spelling

Sentence Structure - Global comments referring to sentence structure or specific references to syntax.

Word Choice

Grammar - Undifferentiated comments, i.e., "good grammar," "poor grammar."

Format - Comments having to do with the formal qualities of a letter and its appearance, i.e., salutation, handwriting, neatness.

Twenty of the 26 positive and negative types of rater comments were shown to have a significant relationship at the $p < 0.05$ level with the holistic scores that had been given the letters. The significant variables were positive and negative comments on documentation, voice, structure, style, sentence structure; positive comments on word choice and letter format; and negative comments on grammar. Six of the comment categories did not show a significant relationship with the holistic scores. These categories were positive and negative comments on spelling, positive comments on mechanics, and negative comments on word choice, grammar, and letter format.

Audience Type

A factorial analysis of variance was made on the comment categories that showed a relationship to holistic evaluations in order to determine whether or not there were significant differences between the comments and rater type and/or the audience type for whom the letters were written. Statistical analysis revealed that only eight comment categories showed significant differences in relation to the letters' audience type: positive and negative comments on idea and structure, positive comments on style and word choice, and negative comments

on sentence structure and documentation. The difference in the comments made by raters on letters written for different audience types is evidence that there was an actual attempt made by the writers to adapt their strategies to meet what they believed to be the special needs of each of the four types of audience in the study: teachers, students, parents, and business people.

The evaluators' analytical response to the letters seemed to be consistent with their global, holistic responses. Statistically significant comments on letters to business people and teachers were all positive in nature. Regardless of rater type, evaluators were favorably impressed with the structure and organization of letters written to teachers and business people. A significant number of positive comments on style and word choice were made on letters written to teachers, and the number of positive comments on ideas was significant in letters written to business people.

Comments on letters written to students and parents also reflected the holistic evaluation that was made in the study. While letters to students were remarkable for the number of positive comments that were made on their style, they received significantly large numbers of negative remarks in several categories. There were negative comments about the letters' sentence structure, overall structure, and, most importantly, about ideas and idea development. Readers of all rater types questioned the validity, depth, and relevance of the ideas expressed in letters to students. An analysis of the negative comments made on the letters seems to

suggest that some of the raters' displeasure had to do with the writers' tendency to avoid real issues when addressing studerts. As was noted earlier, arguments in letters to students tended to concentrate on superficial aspects of school such as parking facilities, peeling paint, and broken lockers. Some raters criticized the letters for exaggeration or even misrepresentation of conditions in the building. Letters to parents received a significant number of both positive and negative comments on ideas. Some of these comments were clearly in reaction to the same type of superficial handling of the issues that raters objected to in letters to students, but not all letters to parents were superficial.

Perhaps there is some clue to the readers' general disapproval of the letters to students and parents in the positions that writers took in the letters on the issue. It should be remembered that the writers were asked to decide whether they thought the school that they attended should be renovated or totally rebuilt on a new site. The position of the letter writers tended to depend on the audience to whom they addressed themselves. In the letters to parents and students, eighteen of the twenty writers decidely favored new construction to solve the problem of inadequate high school facilities. Whether they took a stand for new construction or renovation, these writers were also the most likely to object to the consolidation of their school with another in the city, a side issue never actually alluded to in the assigned writing topic, and to make negative comments about the other school and students who would be involved in such a consolidation.

On the other hand, only five letters to teachers directly argued for new construction. The other five letters either urged renovation or pleaded with the reader to take any position on the matter, just as long as something was done to provide students with safe and modern facilities. Letters to business people were overwhelmingly in support of renovation. Nine of 10 letters encouraged renovation for reasons of location, economy, tradition, and old fashioned elegance and beauty.

The evidence suggests that raters were impressed with the arguments found in the letters to business people and teachers, which stressed the need for high quality facilities. They did not regard favorably the negative approach that was taken in some letters to students and parents, which implied that new construction and consolidation would lead to an undesirable mix of students and a deterioration of program.

Rater Type

Almost all of the comment categories that related to the holistic scores of the letters had a significant relationship with rater type. The factorial analysis of variance indicated that only three comment categories out of 20 did not relate: negative comments on documentation and grammar and positive comments on sentence structure. The remaining 17 comment categories showed significant relationships to the evaluators' rater types. Comment categories that showed such a relationship were positive and negative comments on impact, idea, style, and length; positive comments on documentation, word choice, and format; and negative

comments on mechanics and sentence structure.

Business and teacher raters frequently made similar types of remarks on the letters. Both groups, for example, made a significantly high number of positive comments about voice, which indicated an interest in the person behind the letter. Both groups of raters also made a significant number of comments on the letters' organization, sentence structure, style, word choice, and idea development, reflecting a conscious concern with basic writing skills.

The two groups were not always together in their concern about letter characteristics. Teachers made a large number of remarks on the mechanical errors that they found in the papers, while business people were more interested in aspects such as length and format, a fact that is very consistent with the general character of business writing. Remarks made by business raters indicated that they expected the letters to be neat, short, and concise. Still, neither group confined itself to mechanical aspects of writing.

English teachers, of course, have extensive experience in the evaluation of student writing. As a group, they could be expected to identify and discuss a wide range of writing characteristics, and they did. Some of the business raters obviously had thought about organization and audience appeal. They appeared to have definite ideas about letter writing. Some among the business raters, for example, offered specific criticism and advice to the young writers. One advised a writer to "write an outline with major points highlighted prior to writing the

letter." Another cautioned a writer to "confine" himself to "no more than a page and a half," and then he went on to say, "Businessmen are busy--they don't like to spend much time reading long, involved letters."

Considering the attention that business people and teachers gave to important aspects of composition, it may seem surprising that neither group make a statistically significant number of remarks on content. Ideas were, of course, the most generally large category of comment for all groups in the study, and teachers did pay special attention to the way that writers developed or documented their auguments, but neither the teacher nor the business group made a significantly large number of remarks on the worth of the arguments themselves. This relative lack of emphasis on ideas may suggest that the communication purpose of writing, which rhetoricians find central to the writing process, is not of special importance to teachers and business people.

Parents and students, however, concentrated to a great extent on the content of the letters. Parents made a significant number of both positive and negative comments on ideas, while students made a significant number of negative comments on ideas. The frequent use of the idea comment by these two groups may well reflect a genuine interest in the subject on the part of individuals in the study. All of the student raters were students at the high school discussed in the letters, and all of the parents either had children in the present school building or looked forward to when their younger children would attend school in the new or renovated building.

It is also possible that students and parents made a large number of remarks on ideas because they were not prepared to see other aspects of the letters. The student raters were probably more used to having their own writing evaluated and edited for them than in scrutinizing it for themselves. Parent raters may also have found the evaluation task an odd one. They were a very educationally and occupationally diverse group. All business raters held supervisory and management level positions, and all but one was the graduate of a four year college. All of the teachers held a bachelor's degree as a minimum level of education. Parent raters, however, included two people who held middle management positions, two housewives, one blue collar worker, two clerical/office workers, a graduate student, a hospital technician, and an elementary school teacher's aide. For the most part, then, parent raters had less formal education than did either teachers or business people.

Given the profile of student and parent raters, it is not surprising that neither group seemed to have a clear image of specific writing characteristics on which to comment. Parents also made a significant number of related, positive comments on idea development and negative remarks on style, or the writers' "attitudes," and on sentence structure. Their negative comments on sentence structure did not always appear to be true references to syntax, however. Often, they actually seemed to imply criticism of the writers' mechanics or style

Consistent with their large numbers of positive and negative comments on ideas, students also made large numbers of positive

and negative comments on length and impact. Student raters often criticized papers for being too long and commended them for being short. Impact remarks are undifferentiated comments which express general approval and disapproval. Their frequent use suggests that, in many cases, the student raters were not able to determine exactly why they liked or disliked a piece of writing. Perhaps many students do not have a specific criteria for evaluating their own or other people's writing.

Implications of Rater Type

While rater type did not predict an evaluator's global assessment of a text in the holistic scoring of the letters, rater type did contribute significantly to an evaluator's analytical response to writing. Some of these responses seem to have particular implications for evaluation and writing instruction.

1. Considering the attention that teachers gave to important aspects of composition such as idea development, organization, and sentence structure, it is surprising that they did not also make a significantly greater number of remarks on the worth of the arguments made in the letters. The omission of a significantly large number of idea comments suggests that teachers may not stress the communicative purpose of writing that rhetoricians find central to the writing process in writing instruction any more heavily than they stress composition techniques.
2. The large number of positive and negative comments on impact that were made by students suggests that, in many

cases, students were not able to determine why they liked or disliked a piece of writing. This finding implies that many students do not have a real basis for judging either their own writing or that of others. Greater emphasis should be placed on developing a critical ability in students. They should be taught to find the criteria for evaluation that are inherent to each writing task, particularly considering its purpose and audience. It seems important that writing instruction include frequent practice of independent and peer group evaluation techniques.

3. The comments made by business people about structure, length, and format suggest that there is a definite business style of writing. Many business people have clear standards for business correspondence. They call for clean prose that is to the point, concise, and pleasant to look at. Students should be made aware of these standards and be given opportunities to practice this form of writing because it is widely required in modern, non-school situations.

4. The different emphases that various rater types had in making analytical judgements of the letters suggests that members of the community regard student writing from different perspectives. While a general, holistic assessment of a text's effectiveness can be made by raters of different types, it appears that the evaluator's rater type is likely to affect the emphasis that

individuals will place on the relative importance of the different writing characteristics. This variety of expectation makes it all the more imperative that writers have a firm sense of their audience when they begin to write.

Conclusion

This study examined the overall holistic judgement and the positive and negative commentaries that were made by four different types of writing evaluators on 40 different letters, each of which was written to one of four audience types. Underlying the whole study was the assumption that an intensive analysis of the reader-evaluators' holistic scores and comments would yield response patterns that would relate writing evaluation to the background of the rater and to the audience for whom the text was written.

The findings of this study suggest that different rater types are more sensitive to some aspects of writing than to others. Rater types tend to make some comments that are more typical of them than of other rater types. In terms of a global response, however, an evaluator's rater type was not a predictive factor in the study. Audience type was the significant factor in holistic assessment. The highest holistic scores went to letters that had been prepared for teachers and business people, two audiences whom student writers placed at the greatest rhetorical distance from themselves in the letters. The raters were more favorably impressed with these two audiences, perhaps,

because they required naturally the kind of general argument and style that seemed most appropriate to the assessment context which asked evaluators to think of themselves as members of a committee that was to make a report to city officials based on information in the letters.

From the agreement that raters had in the holistic portion of the assessment, it appears that the raters were able to adjust themselves to the single perspective and the goals that had been implied by the assessment context. Consequently, while rater type was influential in a rater's analytical response to a text, the rater's overall impression of the text's success in satisfying the major goals of the writing task was the deciding factor in the holistic ratings that the letters were assigned. These results suggest that the whole impression of a text is greater than the evaluator's analysis of its parts.

TABLE I

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE WITH HOLISTIC RATINGS (H) AS THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE; AUDIENCE FOR WRITER AND RATER TYPE AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES; AND HANDWRITING, NUMBER OF WORDS PER LETTER, SPELLING ERRORS PER NUMBER OF WORDS, AND CONVENTIONAL GRAMMAR ERRORS PER NUMBER OF WORDS AS COVARIATES

Soruce of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratio	Significance of F
Covariates					
Handwriting	18.3	1	18.3	23.9	*0.000
Number of Words	118.5	1	118.5	154.7	*0.000
Spelling	20.6	1	20.6	26.9	*0.000
Conventional Grammar	4.8	1	4.8	6.3	*0.012
Main Effects					
Audience for Writer	20.7	3	6.9	9.0	*0.000
Rater Type	2.4	3	0.8	1.0	0.376
2-Way Interactions	4.3	9	0.5	0.6	0.779
Audience by Rater	4.3	9	0.5	0.6	0.779
Explained	290.5	19	15.3	20.0	*0.000
Residual	1208.0	1577	0.8		
Total	1498.5	1596	0.9		

*= $p < 0.05$

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